



Fairhaven Improvement Association

Fairhaven, MA 02719

A Very Fair Day at the 2019 Fairhaven Homecoming Day Fair

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The setting is small town New England, and that ambience brings to mind the street fairs of our childhoods: hot and sunny, with people everywhere and all kinds of action, all of it seemingly going on at the same time.

The Fairhaven Homecoming Day Fair will be held on Center Street in Fairhaven on Saturday, June 29, 2019, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free, and only heavy rain cancels.

Now in its 43rd year, the annual fair has established itself as a popular summer kickoff event, attracting thousands of locals and visitors from all over southeastern Massachusetts, the Cape and beyond. It's as much a regional event as a local one.

"Its appeal is its variety," says Barbara Acksen, chair of the Homecoming Day Fair Committee for the Fairhaven Improvement Association, which sponsors the fair. "We strive to keep the children mesmerized, and the adults intrigued."

The tree-lined streets around the center of Fairhaven are repurposed as fairgrounds for the day. The town hall, the Millicent Library and the Unitarian Church--all beautiful examples of outstanding architecture built in the late nineteenth century by the town's benefactor Henry Huttleston Rogers--act as both backdrops and participants in the activities.

The town hall serves as the center of all the activity and the stage for the live entertainment. Every fair features a new cast of young musicians and dancers, local bands and solo performers. "Kids' games are held on the lawn, and family members of all ages can go for rides on a full-sized antique fire engine," Acksen says.

On fair day the streets are lined with vendors' booths, some 175 of them attending from all over New England and covering a spectrum of interests. Every year it's a mix of old favorites and new vendors.

By the 10 a.m. start time, the locals are keeping one eye on the latest vendor offerings, the other scanning faces for old friends and acquaintances, because they're very likely to be there.

Out-of-towners come because they've heard about the ambience. Or the action. Or the food. "The food is its own reason to attend," says Sheryl Aguiar, a member of the fair committee.

In 2018 a quick count identified more than 26 food vendors at work. "Some of them are local nonprofit organizations for which the event is a productive fundraiser," Acksen says. Specialty dishes are the order of the day. "I always plan to get there in time to get a cacoila sandwich from the North Fairhaven Improvement Association booth," says one regular fairgoer.

"There's always a line, and they sell out fast."

Other popular dishes include the Whitfield-Manjiro Friendship Society's Japanese Yakisoba noodles, and the East Fairhaven Improvement Association's fresh and robust strawberry shortcakes. Wild Game Sausage Man offers a unique menu of gourmet wild game sausages, gator bites, fried Oreo cookies and more, and he's an entertaining personality to boot. And Poppin Mad Kettle Corn is regularly referenced in post-fair recaps.

If that's not enough variety, hungry visitors can also find lobster rolls, tacos and burritos, bratwurst with sauerkraut, cotton candy, salads, burgers and dawgs and more.

At the fair, dozens of artisans show their wares, ranging from clothing, jewelry, carvings and soaps to nautically-themed accessories. A few of the vendors who have displayed and sold items at the fair are Chinawear by Karen J's handmade jewelry created from vintage dinnerware, Days Gone By Wind Chimes' vintage spoon and teapot wind chimes, sundresses by Sew Hooked, and Dockside Candles' clean-burning soy-blend candles. The Gateway Woodturners Club has offered a multitude of items crafted from various types of wood, as has Silvershell Musical Instruments with its harps, lyres, dulcimers and guitars.

Beyond the streets, the Unitarian Church is also a hotbed of activity at the Homecoming Day Fair. The west lawn of the church serves as the venue for the improvement association's juried art show and the work of local artists.

Visitors can also take a tour of the church, and there's a used book sale going on throughout the day.

The Millicent Library also attracts its share of fairgoers, either newcomers wanting to see what's behind the dignified facade, or returnees recalling their escapades in the three stories of odd niches and book stacks.

"Older visitors still inquire about a display of stuffed squirrels dressed as musicians. Unfortunately, they're long gone," notes library director Carolyn Longworth with a laugh.

Over the years the Homecoming Day Fair has evolved into the core event of a busy Fairhaven weekend, which usually includes reunions for generations of Fairhaven High School grads.

On Friday and Saturday of Homecoming Weekend, free tours of Fairhaven High School will be led by Bob Foster, president of the Fairhaven High School Alumni Association. The Saturday tours start at 10 a.m. and at noon.

On Sunday there's a car show at Cushman Park, a \$10 All-Class Breakfast Buffet at the high school, and a Hall of Fame banquet recognizing the high school's best sports teams and stars over the years, many of them coming from out of state to attend.

Be warned, street parking in the center of Fairhaven fills up very quickly on fair day, and it can be tough to maneuver through the parked cars on the narrow streets. Visitors can park at the Fairhaven High School on Route 6 and take the short shuttle ride to the fair (and visitors parking in the center of town can take the shuttle to the high school for the tours there). Free handicapped parking is available.

For more information email FairhavenHomecoming@gmail.com or visit the Fairhaven Improvement Association website at fairhavenimprovement.org, of the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FairhavenImprovementAssociation/>.